



Voice of the Child Podcast Transcript

Episode 1: Phase One of Starcatchers' research: "Towards an arts-based methodology for participation with pre- and non-verbal children (birth - 3 years)"

Featuring Rhona Matheson and Dr Rachel Drury

Quick links

- **Voice of the Child:** <https://starcatchers.org.uk/work/the-voice-of-the-child/>
- **This podcast episode:** <https://www.buzzsprout.com/1853569/12202728-let-s-talk-about-the-voice-of-the-child.mp3?download=true>
- **Where is the Voice of Scotland's Babies? event:** <https://starcatchers.org.uk/work/where-is-the-voice-of-scotlands-babies/>

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00:00:08:10 - 00:01:04:01

Rhona Matheson

Welcome to today's episode of Let's Talk About. Today, we're going to be talking about why babies' voices matter. I'm joined by Dr. Rachel Drury from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, a music psychologist, researcher and practicing musician and artist whose works for Starcatchers over a number of years. Together, we're going to be exploring a project she's delivering for Starcatchers that's looking at the development of an arts-based methodology for participation with pre- and non-verbal children. Really, what we want to try and do is understand what babies and very young children are trying to communicate to us in their interactions, and using the arts as the vehicle to do that. This has been a really interesting project so far and this episode will give us some insight into what Rachel and her colleague Claire have been exploring and discovering. I hope you enjoy it.

00:01:09:06 - 00:01:33:18

Rhona Matheson

This is a conversation about a piece of work that we have been doing, erm, with you, Dr. Rachel Drury from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, for about a year now. But this is a project that we have called "Towards an arts-based methodology for participation with pre- and non- verbal children."

00:01:33:19- 00:01:34:24

Dr Rachel Drury

Just trips off the tongue doesn't it.

00:01:34:25- 00:02:22:01

Rhona Matheson

It really trips of the tongue! But this is really a piece of work that is rooted in the voice of our youngest children, in the rights of our youngest children. enabling our youngest children to access their rights, particularly around that Article 12 and the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is about children having their views heard and those views being given weight and consideration. And the reason that we've got to this point really came, I'm just going to do a little bit of context for people who might be listening, over the last few years as conversations here in Scotland have built around the incorporation of the UN Convention into domestic law.

00:02:22:02 - 00:02:57:06

Rhona Matheson

Whilst there is already lost participation and consultation work taking place with children, young people in Scotland, very little of that work was taking place with very young children, maybe five plus, maybe occasionally three, maybe maybe three, certainly four or five year olds occasionally, but generally that a lot that consultation work takes place with children and young people who have voice, who have language, who can use their words to, to tell people what they think and what they feel.

00:02:58:10 - 00:03:38:19

Rhona Matheson

And we were beginning to get requests from other organisations, statutory services, professionals in the field, asking us as an organisation about how you do consultation with babies. And we had lots of conversations internally about the fact that we are always listening to, listening in inverted commas, what the babies are telling us and how they're responding to the experiences that we offer informs the work that the artists that we work with do, but informs the direction of the organisation, informs where we might do work, how we might do work, and what the content of that work is.

00:03:39:01 - 00:04:02:13

Rhona Matheson

And we developed our engagement signals through, through research on pilot projects, more than ten years ago now., and that those were a bit of a touchstone for us in terms of thinking about how young children engage with the kinds of experiences that we offer. But those, that kind of conversation about how do you do consultation with babies, really, sort of sat with with me and with some of the other team.

00:04:02:13 - 00:04:30:20

Rhona Matheson

And we kept coming back to this as a as an idea, and so we had a really brilliant conversation with Sophie Flemig at Cattnach, who offered to provide some support towards the first phase of this work. And at the same time, we had started to have conversations with you, Rachel, all about your involvement. And so do you want to just give a bit of an introduction to yourself and, and the work that you do and your relationship with us?

00:04:31:01 - 00:04:52:20

Dr Rachel Drury

Yeah, sure. So, yeah, I'm an artist. Music is my discipline. I trained at the, what used to be the RSAMD as a saxophonist, and I very much got involved in kind of community music and more latterly community music therapy, those kind of crossovers in terms of my work. So that and research and how those, those two things linked together.

00:04:53:06 - 00:05:24:12

Dr Rachel Drury

So I'm really interested in how you create art for and with early years, but also for children who maybe don't have language, who may be slightly older than that baby's infant age, but also don't have language. Yeah. So my research interests very much hinge around music psychology, really, and how music and the arts generally influence human behavior. My PhD was looking at language development, so it's very much rooted in kind of developmental psychology as well.

00:05:24:13- 00:05:47;11

Dr Rachel Drury

So. So when you came with this kind of idea as to, looking at how we use the arts to, for participation with pre- and non-verbal children, it's it kind of ticks all of the, all of the boxes in terms of my areas of interest. And I suppose one thing that is hopefully quite useful is that I straddle the research academic world, but also the arts.

00:05:47:12- 00:05:59:08

Dr Rachel Drury

You know, I'm a practitioner, an artist in my own right, as well as a researcher. So that offers a slightly different insight, I suppose, to going down a purely kind of academic route.

00:06:00:05 - 00:06:34:23

Rhona Matheson

Yeah. To us you were the, the, the first person that sprang to mind when we were talking about doing this work. And actually, you know, who in terms of the area of work that we sit in and what we were looking at and looking at it through the research lens but having that added, that added benefit of understanding what it's like on the other side as a, you know, in terms of doing the practice in, in situ with very young children and, and parents and carers.

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Rhona Matheson

So, we're just at the end of this sort of first phase of this piece of work. And as you know, Rachel, I get very excited about what the end point is going to be and this amazing toolkit resource training thing that we we will hopefully be sharing with with the world, certainly with people from across different sectors here in Scotland.

0:07:00:01 - 00:07:39:21

Rhona Matheson

And what has been really interesting is that over the last year, whilst we've been talking about this work, but particularly over the last few months whilst we've started to to share the, the findings that you and Claire Ruckert, who's been our research assistant on this first phase, erm, as we start to share some of those findings, that that's really sparking interest in people here, but also in other parts of the UK and elsewhere, definitely feels like we are scratching away at the surface of something that that could have real tangible benefits all over the place, which is really, really exciting.

00:07:39:22 - 00:08:27:05

Rhona Matheson

And from my perspective, when we're thinking about the rights of our youngest children, it's really exciting because if we are incorporating the convention into domestic law here, if we're going to properly implement that, my feeling is that we have to make sure that we're we're starting with our youngest children because that convention comes into effect from birth. So if we if we're not thinking about the rights of babies, as soon as they arrive in the world and how they have a sense of agency, how they build that sense of agency, and then begin to understand that with that comes the fulfillment of the rights that they have as human beings, as children.

00:08:27:21 - 00:08:44:24

Rhona Matheson

But as human beings, we have to be starting from from that point and from that we can we can really look at a full implementation of of that convention. And I get quite excited about

that. I'm not, we're not here to talk about that. We're here to talk about the first phase of this this work that you've been doing.

00:08:44:25 - 00:08:53:03

Rhona Matheson

So, do you want to just talk us through what you've been doing and we can pull out some of the things that you're quite excited about within that.

00:08:53:20 - 00:09:21:00

Dr Rachel Drury

Yeah, so I think the things that I'm the things that I'm most excited about, just in terms of the context of this work, is that I mean, this is a really timely piece of research both for myself and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, but also for you guys at Starcatchers as well. I think the thing that draws me towards this and continues to draw me towards this, this kind of research is is that we're looking at where various different contexts intersect.

00:09:21:01 - 00:09:40:23

Dr Rachel Drury

I suppose. So, we've got the policy and we've got the law around the UNCRC, we've got the arts and culture, erm, with Starcatchers, we've got the research in the social sciences that are coming alongside and all of those things pulling together to look at something that I think is, you quite rightly said, there is hugely important in terms of everybody being able to realise their rights no matter how young they may be.

00:09:41:22 - 00:10:06:16

Dr Rachel Drury

So what we've been doing is basically three different things. The first thing is looking at the literature on this already. So best place to start is, is asking the question, okay, so what do we, the global we, already know about this area. So that's where Claire Ruckert who's the research assistant, has come in. She's done some fabulous work pulling together a literature review on on this particular subject area.

00:10:06:16 - 00:10:36:10

Dr Rachel Drury

So looking at children and the rights of the child, particularly when it comes to babies and pre and non-verbal children, she has found very much that there's not a great deal when it comes to pre and non-verbal children. Generally speaking, consultation takes place either when a child is already verbal or already has some kind of dexterity and skill to be able to create a picture, for example, some kind of way of expressing artistically what their their views and opinions are.

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Dr Rachel Drury

So there's definitely a gap in the in the literature around this. Erm, so it feels like a really exciting starting point actually to begin to try and yeah, put some building blocks in place to make sure that we can, we can begin to feel that. Two of the things that we've done, the

first one is very much looking at Starcatchers and the best practice within the arts organisation.

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Dr Rachel Drury

It's a very forward looking organisation. It is Scotland's organisation for early years. So it's, it's the perfect place to start. And the, you know, the amount of staff that that work for and with Starcatches means that we've got a really rich kind of overview of what's happening in Scotland. I mean, you, you guys do work the length and breadth of Scotland, so it's kind of all encompassing in that respect.

0:11:23:01 - 00:11:44:09

Dr Rachel Drury

So really it was to have a look and see what's happening, what's the best practice just now, and how can that be developed as far as Starcatches are concerned? And then the third part was just beginning to map the sector, so putting some feelers out, asking some of the other arts companies and organisations across Scotland just to begin to tell us about their their processes.

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Dr Rachel Drury

As far as gathering feedback from pre and non-verbal infants, how they go about doing that. Is it through an adult? Is it through the child themselves? What does it look like in their company? How far up is that on their agenda in relation to the UNCRC coming into domestic law? So I think it's kind of threefold what we've what we've done, but all of those, those three things kind of come together to give us a much more nuanced picture of the arts in Scotland in relation to human rights and a child's rights approach.

00:12:17:00 - 00:12:34:01

Rhona Matheson

Brilliant. So, what were the, what were some of the key findings that that came up? Was there anything in there that you found particularly surprising or were there things that you anticipated that came up? Or was it did it feel quite new?

00:12:34:23 - 00:13:07:03

Dr Rachel Drury

Erm, I think there wasn't necessarily anything that I found massively surprising. I think having working in this sector as an artist myself, erm, I suppose I'm aware of a certain number of things in and around this, erm, this context. One of the big things for me, if I'm creating work for this age group, is the importance of the fact that you're not just creating artwork for the infant or with the infant, because that infant invariably comes with an adult, a, a significant other.

00:13:07:12 - 00:13:39:04

Dr Rachel Drury

And they are the gatekeepers actually in terms of that child engaging with the artistic experience. So on, on a very fundamental level, there's this kind of triangular model going

on between the artist or the arts experience, whichever you want, the child themselves, but also their significant other, the adult. Erm, and there's relationships, you know, this this six relationships there because they go either way between artist and child, child and artist, so on and so forth.

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Dr Rachel Drury

And all of that has to be taken into account when you are creating work for early years. So actually it's a hugely complex process for artists who are, erm, who are working in this, in this field. I think very often, certainly in the past, the, you know, people looked down on in terms of a hierarchy, there is a hierarchy, I suppose, in terms of artistic work for children versus artistic work for adults.

00:14:05:13 - 00:14:42:15

Dr Rachel Drury

And, you know, the proper stuff is the stuff for the adults. And then it's just kind of playing and singing a few silly songs. Is it not? Working with, err, with infants? And it's something that I know Starcatchers have battled against since your inception. And I think that, you know, to to really look at this in some depth from a from a research angle and look at the complexity of what's involved actually, in terms of creating something that is engaging, not just for the, erm, the infant, which is primarily the the focus point, but also making sure that you, you know, you're you're working with the adults as well.

00:14:42:23 - 00:14:52:12

Dr Rachel Drury

They're two beings, two members of the audience at very different biological stages in their lives, erm, and this artistic practice has to work for both.

00:14:52:24 - 00:15:17:02

Rhona Matheson

Yeah. And it's really I mean, it keeps, to me that point that whether it's the dyad relationship between the infant and the parent or the that that sort of tri, that triangulation of, you know, artist/ arts experience, parent, baby. There's something about one of the other articles of the CRC, Article five, which is all around the role of the adult.

00:15:17:03 - 00:15:48:06

Rhona Matheson

I mean, it's very much focused on the role of, the role of a parent. But actually I think in some of the general, the general comments, they talk much more about it being about the role of the adult and how they are enabling and supporting children to access the rights based on the evolving capacity of the child. And that term, the capacity is a term that I think nowadays causes causes debate in terms of whether we should be using that as the the right term.

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Rhona Matheson

But I suppose it's that it's that sense of, you know, as children grow up, they develop in their own way. And with that comes the ability, different abilities to express themselves in new ways and in different ways as they have language, as they have more physical movements, you know, all of these sorts of things. It's part of that evolving process of growing up.

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Rhona Matheson

But the role of the adult, whether it's parent, or carer, or artist within that just cements it all together for me. Particularly when we're we're looking at work for for for babies where they are very much kind of voiceless in the bigger picture. They're reliant on us as adults to enable them to access their rights to able to attend performances or experiences or, you know, to be fed, to be watered, to be clothed.

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Rhona Matheson

All of these things, they are absolutely reliant on the adults that surround them. So there's something, you know, there's there's there's one thing where we are talking about this, the idea of developing this, this methodology toolkit, life changing resource, world changing resource and what that looks like. But to me, it's about being able to link it to these other aspects of the convention and how we are how we are supporting our youngest children to thrive in our society.

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Dr Rachel Drury

Absolutely. Yeah, because that also plays in very much, doesn't it, to, you know, article 31 and the right to artistic and cultural experiences and they should be high value, you know, artistic and cultural experiences. They, it shouldn't be it shouldn't be something that seen as this is a dumbed down version of what adults get or this is a version that is, you know, an adult can go and watch.

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Dr Rachel Drury

It's basically an adult production but will permit babies to cry through or, you know, so there is...

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Rhona Matheson

Yeah, yeah, it's a bit of that baby friendly, you know, thing yeah, I think it's it's for us it's about seeing babies as as those active agents, you know, they are it's really rooted in that sort of new new sociology of childhood where we're seeing them as active citizens who have a contribution to make to society. Therefore they have particular needs. And so going to a theatre to sit through a three hour show with a with a curtain and an interval and all of those things is not appropriate for the the stage of development that babies are at.

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Rhona Matheson

But that's not to say that they can't engage with a performance or a visual art installation or a much more participative, interactive, creative experience, which all of which are the kinds of things that we are offering. And it's also that thing of there's something that that comes with having an artist in the room, but also how do we have, you know, other practitioners who are channeling their own creativity and bringing that experience to the to the space where where the babies are?

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Rhona Matheson

So there's there's lots of different layers and levels of things that are that are at play. But I think fundamentally, it's about seeing the incredible potential that babies have to connect and contribute and tell you what they think of the experience that they're having.

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Dr Rachel Drury

Because they do tell you! That's one of the, yeah, I love working with infant audiences because they, they're not backwards in coming forwards about telling you what they think about the experience. And you know, there's a lovely quote from the research that we've done from a Starcatchers member of staff who said, and I'm I'm kind of paraphrasing here, but, you know, babies are born being able to communicate , erm, and wanting to communicate.

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Dr Rachel Drury

And it is about harnessing that, isn't it. And yeah. And listening to that voice and being able to make that voice count in relation to then what is, what is on offer.

00:20:09:12- 00;20:47:24

Rhona Matheson

Yeah. Well we've always, I mean that, that really chimes with, you know, I've had many conversations with Susanne Zeedyk over the years and you know her, the line that stuck with me from the very first time I heard her speak was she says babies come into the world connected. Yeah. And, you know connected and being able to communicate are exactly, you know, they are the same thing and it's absolutely rooted in that need that babies have to connect and so being able to find ways to communicate they are, you can only imagine, you know, not being a baby anymore.

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Rhona Matheson

You know, you can only imagine how the kind of the processes that are going on there is it's no wonder babies need to sleep for a big chunk of the day because of all of those, you know, the synapses and things that are being connected in their brains. But that even just thinking about what it would be like to try and figure out how you communicate with someone when you don't have language, you don't have the kind of the mechanisms that we have as as fully formed.

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Rhona Matheson

Erm, human beings, as it were, but they find their ways. I suppose that's what I'm trying to say. They find these other ways of communicating and we have to tune in to how they are sharing with us. And I think that's where, when we're talking about consultation and participation with very young children, it becomes challenging because when we are having conversations externally and we've done some consultation work in the past, you might only you know, there might only be enough resource to do a session with a group of very young children.

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Rhona Matheson

That's not enough. If we want to do it meaningfully, we actually have to be able to build relationships with with the children. And that doesn't mean to say that you have to do it over a year or 20 weeks or whatever. But one session with a group of very young children will tell you some things, but it's not really enough to do it meaningfully.

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Rhona Matheson

And I think that's where this kind of approach that we want to be exploring here can really inform how that work can take place in the future.

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Dr Rachel Drury

Absolutely. So, yeah, it's it's arts and human connection, isn't it? And it's it's exploring that. And I think for me that's one of the most exciting parts of the work that , that I've ultimately become involved in, which is looking at, you know, on the, with one foot in the artistic camp, and one foot in social sciences and how those two areas inform one another.

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Dr Rachel Drury

In relation to, particularly with child development, but you know, across the board, the power of the of relationships within that is absolutely enormous and how we can use the arts to foster that.

00:23:04:24 - 00:23:07:23

Rhona Matheson

Absolutely. What else did you find out?

00:23:07:23 - 00;23;58;18

Dr Rachel Drury

So, other things that we, other things that kind of came out particularly of the, erm, the scoping exercise, so looking at the way in which artists interact with infants, but also the way that the artistic organisations that they are working with or for and gather that data is slightly different, which is really interesting. And it tells me straightaway that, which is probably not going to come as a surprise, but the people who who are creating much more meaningful relationships and feedback with the Early Years audience are the artists

themselves, erm, they're the ones who are talking very much about, you know, observation techniques and understanding the need for the adult to be almost like an interface,

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Dr Rachel Drury

if you like, between, erm, infant and the artistic practice and the feedback of that. So that's one of the things I think in terms of arts organisations, it's really difficult, this, isn't it? Because I think as a society, we we tend to measure the things that are easy to measure. We do that in education all the time.

00;24;18;20 - 00;24;38;14

Dr Rachel Drury

And we don't necessarily pay enough attention to the things that are not very easy to to measure, not very easy to kind of gather data on. And I think the work that we're doing just now is beginning to tap into that a little bit as far as feedback from early years audiences concerned who are either pre or or non-verbal.

00;24;38;15 - 00;24;58;14

Dr Rachel Drury

And so I think the way in which organisations, a lot of organisations from the data that we've collected, gather feedback from early years is to do it through an adult, erm, as opposed to doing it through the infant themselves. Whereas the artist will do that, erm as the work, as the work continues.

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Rhona Matheson

Yeah, and that's the bit that's, that's going to be really interesting to see how we, how we build that and present that moving forwards. Do you want to touch a little bit on, because we were obviously ,we were talking about pre-verbal and non-verbal and there was a very particular age range that was within this this work that we're talking about.

00;25;20;21 - 00;25;28;00

Rhona Matheson

And yeah, it's maybe useful just to unpack that a little bit for people who are listening and maybe haven't heard about this before.

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Dr Rachel Drury

Yep, definitely. I think this is actually a really important thing to talk about because every single human being will develop at a different rate from the next. So the reason why we chose 0 to 3 was because that in the in the research literature, that was the age group that was far less represented, if represented at all, in relation to participatory arts and yeah, human rights and feedback from those kind of experiences.

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Dr Rachel Drury

So we decided 0 to 3 would be quite useful in terms of the literature to look at that. However, we absolutely recognize that children between the ages of 0 and 3, you will have some who are who are pre-verbal and you'll have some who are verbal by that point in time. So there has to be some kind of distinction between that as well in terms of our of our research.

00:26:16:15 - 00:26:53:12

Dr Rachel Drury

But essentially those kind of, those those age ranges, that boundary came from from what the research literature told us. Erm, so I think there's there's definitely more in terms of the scoping exercise that I've talked about, kind of mapping the sector, the arts in Scotland. There is definitely more kind of nuanced work we can do there in relation to asking questions around more specific age groups within that, because any any developmental psychologist, any parent will tell you that there is an enormous amount of development that happens between birth and the age of three.

00;25;44;15 - 00;26;07;05

Dr Rachel Drury

I mean, it's mind blowingly enormous. Erm, so essentially we are looking at a very big range, even though it's only three years, but in developmental stages, it's absolutely huge. So yeah. So I think in terms of the next steps, we can think about how we how we can begin to focus in on the things that we, we want to know next.

00:26:53:19 - 00:27:16:09

Dr Rachel Drury

Having got this kind of general picture from Phase one.

00:27:20:22 - 00:27:29:00

Rhona Matheson

Yeah, and is there anything else from Phase one? Because we keep hinting at next steps, but I'm just wondering if there's anything else from phase one that you want to highlight?

00:27:30:03 - 00:27:56:10

Dr Rachel Drury

I think one of the, one of the quite interesting themes, if you like, that developed from the three bits of research that I outlined earlier was this idea of sharing children spaces and this reversal of hierarchy and that does a number of things. I think, in terms of the adults, there are some adults who are unbelievably uncomfortable with the prospect of play as adults.

00:27:56:22 - 00:28:15:24

Dr Rachel Drury

There are some who will who will kind of grab that bull by the horns and run with it quite happily. Erm, but for some adults, that's a that can be a very kind of, I suppose, vulnerable state to be in, to be back in that, erm, yeah, to be asked to play. It's not something that a lot of adults and a lot of jobs that adults do.

00:28:16:13 - 00:28:19:11

Dr Rachel Drury

Yeah. Get to experience on a daily basis.

00:28:19:11 - 00:28:43:15

Rhona Matheson

Yeah. And I'm sitting here pointing at myself because you know, actually I don't do a lot of playing in my day to day life, my, in my work. The work is all about play and creativity and the arts and the joy and wonder that comes from those experiences that we are offering. But I don't get to do that work.

00:28:43:15 - 00:29:06:07

Rhona Matheson

It's the artists that we work with who are having those experiences. And so sometimes when I go into sessions where we might be doing some team sessions with Starcatchers folk in it and it's that sort of sense, how do you shake off the that kind of not very adult centric, you know, kind of place that you end up?

00:29:06:08- 00:29:09:23

Rhona Matheson

Where being playful isn't what we do anymore.

00:29:09:23 - 00:29:35:03

Dr Rachel Drury

Absolutely. And I think that links very nicely back to what you were talking about in terms of relationships, because you need to build that not just with the infants but with the adults as well that they bring with them in order to allow them to feel comfortable enough to engage in that way. And when they do, then there's there's that kind of tangible impact between the relationship of them and their infant.

00:29:35:17 - 00:29:58:11

Dr Rachel Drury

As well because you know, it flips the hierarchy and I think it is that is that thing of adults entering a child's space and needing to be respectful of the, the kind of social context in which that is, as opposed to a child being in an adult space. And it's interesting because, you know, adults absolutely need to, they they have a responsibility to keep their child safe.

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Dr Rachel Drury

So they do need to pull rank very often. You know, particularly in the early years But they're I think what the arts offers is a space where that can be reversed. Erm, and actually maybe I would hope for a lot of adults that's actually a really, you know, that lifts a whole weight off their shoulders, even if it's just for 20 minutes.

00:30:18:04 - 00:30:23:20

Dr Rachel Drury

It's, you know, they can lose themselves in and follow their, you know, follow the lead of their child.

00:30:23:22 - 00:30:55:20

Rhona Matheson

Yeah. And that's there's something fundamental there about children accessing their rights in that in that process and that sense of, yes, you know, sometimes we do have to say no. But if you are, if a child expresses something and for whatever reason, the answer is no. If we're getting it right, we can go through a process with those the child or the children.

00:30:55:20 - 00:31:28:00

Rhona Matheson

If there's if there's more than one of them in that context and give that expression of desire the weight and consideration that they're entitled to. And even if it is no, sometimes, you know, that idea of children being able to have their voices heard, is not about the the response always being yes. It's it's about being able to consider and respond so that if you need to say no, you can say this is why we're saying no or this is why we're saying yes.

00:31:28:22 - 00;31;58;24

Rhona Matheson

But actually, we've heard what you've said and we've taken that on board. And even if we are saying no, these are the the reasoning behind it. You know, it can I think it can open up a real kind of dialog that can filter across people's life. It's not just the sense that if you are and I suppose this is where this work to me becomes the potential of it becomes far greater because it can be something that can inform a conversation in a childcare setting or a conversation at home.

00;31;58;25 - 00:32:25:18

Rhona Matheson

As much as it could be informing a consultation that can inform decision making at a local or a national level. It is like, yes, I've got grand aspirations for that. But that sense that it can empower the adults to really understand how they can respond to their child. And there's something really exciting in that.

00:32:26:01 - 00:32:49:07

Dr Rachel Drury

Absolutely. And I think, you know, the we can't underestimate the the power of being listened to. I think, you know, we as adults know that we know when we're being fobbed off or we're not being listened to. And it's a hugely frustrating experience for the most part. And, you know, so I think this it's hugely important to be able to to listen to and respect the views of different people.

00:32:49:07 - 00:33:08:09

Dr Rachel Drury

And if if we get annoyed as adults that people aren't listening to us, then I can only imagine what it must be like for a child who then can't communicate either what it is that they're trying to communicate or their frustration about it in the ways that, you know, we we are willing to take on board. So I think that that whole listening thing is hugely important.

00:33:08:15 - 00:33:29:20

Dr Rachel Drury

I think another thing that is massively important that that very much came out of the the research is this idea of, yes, we might be taking on their views, but how do we how do we close that feedback loop? How do we let that child know that their views and opinions have had an impact? And how do we show them what that impact is?

00:33:30:08 - 00:33:54:18

Dr Rachel Drury

And again, I think the arts have a, you know, we're in a very we're in a brilliant position actually to be able to do that through the arts because we can do that in the moment with the artistic experience. It can be something that is child centered and ultimately child led, and they can see that what they have offered is being presented back to them, you know, has been taken on board and been presented back to them.

00:33:54:24 - 00:34:01:06

Dr Rachel Drury

And I think it's yeah, again, it's finding ways to harness that and see how that can work across multiple contexts.

00:34:01:14 - 00:34:05:21

Rhona Matheson

Yeah. No, absolutely. So, where's it going to go? What's next?

00:34:05:22 - 00:34:46:13

Dr Rachel Drury

This is the exciting bit, isn't it? Yeah. I think phase one was all about just figuring out where we're at. I suppose. In relation to the Scottish context, having a look at it in relation to the research literature that is available at the moment as far as the UNCRC is concerned and also looking at where Starcatches is at. The next step is to begin to pull all of that together and begin to pilot the the ideas that are coming out as far as this framework is concerned and trail that through the artists and Starcatches and look and see what is what is working, what is, what's going to be useful to take forwards with

00:34:46:13 - 00:35:08:15

Dr Rachel Drury

the hope that by the end of phase two, we should come up with some kind of prototype, if you like, of this this framework for participation. And I think beyond that, it's then looking at how that how that is rolled out across the arts in general, but also how that can be how that can be rolled out and in different contexts as well.

00:35:08:15 - 00:35:21:15

Dr Rachel Drury

So, for example, health care or social care or, you know, the law, for example, any, any kind of instance where, where the voice of the child, the pre and the non-verbal child is, you know, needs to be heard.

00:35:21:22 - 00:35:45:13

Rhona Matheson

Yeah. I mean, I would really like us to be in a place where, you know, whenever there is a consultation taking place, that the, the needs of the, of different cohorts are being recognised, and it's not just purely, right we're going to consult with young people so generally, you know, 14 plus or we're going to consult with children, which might be, you know, 8 to 12s.

00:35:47:00 - 00:36:13:02

Rhona Matheson

But that actually there's consideration given to the youngest kind of early years, kind of middle mid-range children childhoods as well as as young people because, you know, older children and young people are the ones who can shout louder because they've got those those language skills. And quite often they've built that kind of confidence. I remember what it was like being a teenager.

00:36:14:22 - 00:36:15:10

Dr Rachel Drury

The squeaky hinge gets the oil

00:36:15:10 - 00:36:43:03

Rhona Matheson

Yeah. And you know, that, that, that actually that's what we can potentially be looking at looking at the, you know, people understand that in order to do some consultation or participation with very young children, that actually this is a model that can be used, but it also needs a bit of extra time and resource in order for that to be facilitated to the to the best, to the best effect.

00:36:43:12 - 00:36:57:06

Rhona Matheson

But that's not to to diminish the importance of getting the views and perspectives of, you know, children, young people kind of across ages. But again, it's just coming back to saying, let us not forget about this cohort.

00:36:57:07 - 00:37:16:18

Rhona Matheson

Do you think, because I suppose the other aspects in terms of non-verbal are children with with disabilities, and, you know, do you think there's potential for, you know, an adaptation of this model that could be used in that kind of context as well?

00:37:16:18 - 00:37:45:09

Dr Rachel Drury

I think there's huge potential for that. That's another angle of this research that really excites me on a different day and with a different hat on, I'm music specialist at a children's hospice in Kinross. And this is something that again is completely fundamental to my work as an artist, erm, in terms of non-verbal children having their views heard in relation to the experience that and that we create with them, not necessarily for them, but with them.

00:37:45:09 - 00:37:59:21

Dr Rachel Drury

So I think, you know, there's the potential for this to have quite significant ramifications for for children who are older but non-verbal or or limited in terms of communication. And so yeah, I mean, hugely important.

00:38:00:16 - 00:38:29:21

Rhona Matheson

It's coming back to the kind of the different cohorts of children whose rights are most at risk because they're not able to, you know, they're overlooked or they're not in a position to to kind of claim claim them in that way. So, you know, I, that's also where I get excited about this work that yes, it's absolutely about our youngest children and ensuring that they're not overlooked but actually, if it can have a really positive impact for other children, then so much the better.

00:38:29:22- 00:39:00:23

Rhona Matheson

And it is it's all feeding this sense that, you know, children and young people are citizens of our world, of our country and that they have they have a place and they have they all have contributions to make. So let's find the right way in order to facilitate those contributions and let them be shared. And for us as decision makers, policy makers, whoever to be responding to them in the best way possible.

00:39:01:04 - 00:39:26:04

Dr Rachel Drury

Definitely, I think. Yeah. I mean, I think I think what's so important for me is which is why we started with what we've what we've done in phase one, which is looking at the work of Starcatchers and the artists that that are creating work for this age group. There is some phenomenal practice going on across Scotland, across a variety of context know, within hospices, within hospitals, you know, artists going into hospitals, within the arts sector itself.

00:39:26:05- 00:39:53:08

Dr Rachel Drury

There's just some absolutely phenomenal practice, but none of that has been formalised in a way that will help. I think us as artists and arts organisations move forwards with creating what we should be creating for and with an infant audience. And again, it relates straight back to Article 31 in terms of their right to access arts and culture, and that that should be high quality arts and culture.

00:39:53:08 - 00:40:13:08

Dr Rachel Drury

And, and you know what? It's not me as the academic that's going to tell you what constitutes high art for it and how we do that for infants. It's, it's them. It's infants themselves who are going to, you know, tell us in whatever way they can what it is that is most meaningful for them, what it is that works for them, what it is that they need.

00:40:13:08 - 00:40:48:09

Dr Rachel Drury

We know that the arts across the board has such a fundamental relationship with the development of a human being. I mean, it's just it's from the very earliest of cave paintings, you know, that arts are depicted as a central power of, of humanity and human development. So yeah, to be able to, to be able to try and use those in order to empower a group of citizens in the world, very young citizens, but citizens of the world to realize their rights is feels like a very natural way forwards.

00:40:49:07 - 00:41:06:24

Rhona Matheson

Brilliant. Well with that Rachel, thank you very much for joining me this afternoon. We should have a report from the first phase that will be shared and hopefully we'll be able to share that at the same time as this podcast on the Starcatchers website. But yes, thank you again, Rachel.

00:41:07:22 - 00:41:08:16

Dr Rachel Drury

Thanks very much.

00:41:17:17 - 00:44:32:13

Speaker 1

Thanks for listening to the episode. You can find out more about this project on the Starcatchers' website at starcatchers.org.uk or follow the links below. Follow us on our social media @StarcatchersUK to keep up to date with this research project and our work across the sector.